

Comments and responses to the draft Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Plan

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
Comments on the draft Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Plan
October 2004

General Comments

1. It appears that most of the procedural changes in the Rocky Mountain Arsenal (RMA) National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Plan are intended to enhance opportunities for public access to the RMA's natural resources and provide the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) operational flexibility in implementing public use programs. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) agrees that the establishment of the RMA National Wildlife Refuge and upcoming period of uncontaminated grade fill placement and cover construction provides for enhanced public use opportunities. While most of the changes proposed are appropriate, some of the changes deviate from previous commitments made in the February 2003 Final Interim Institutional Control Plan, (IICP). Other proposed changes, while acceptable during the upcoming phase of clean construction, need to be carefully considered prior to resumption of active intrusive remediation. Please see specific comments below.

Response: The Service appreciates CDPHE's recognition that public use opportunities can be enhanced as the remedial activity moves into a period of clean construction work. The Service also appreciates CDPHE's concerns regarding the resumption of active intrusive remediation and has made changes to the Public Use Plan to address those concerns (see responses to specific comments, below).

The Service acknowledges that its plan to allow public access to the Visitor Center on weekends, through an un-staffed South Gate, is not consistent with the IICP. However, the Service does not believe that maintaining staff at the South Gate on weekends is necessary to prevent visitors from entering unauthorized areas, or is a wise use of limited resources. We base that belief on our experience with weekend visitation since October 2002, and the current status of remediation activities. The Service believes that the IICP should be changed to account for the current status of the remedy. Institutional controls should be appropriate for the threats and risks that actually exist. The Service looks forward to working with CDPHE and other RMA Parties to appropriately revise the IICP.

Specific Comments

1. Section 1.11, Refuge Overview – a) first para. -Please insert the phrase “most of” following “the statute determined that” in the second sentence. (Also, this section number appears to be a typo., i.e., 1.11 versus 1.1). b) second para. – The first sentence about all of the RMA becoming a refuge “overlay” is confusing. CDPHE suggests the following language for consideration by the Service: “Except for those areas retained for environmental cleanup purposes under section

2(c) of the Act and those areas designated for disposal under section 5(a) of the Act, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service assumed the responsibility in 1992, under section 2(a) of the Act, to manage the property as if it were a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System.”

Response: The plan has been changed as recommended in comment 1a). The Service has chosen to retain the language referred to in comment 1b). The Service acknowledges that the subjects of secondary jurisdiction, overlay refuges, and “manage as if it were a unit...” are likely confusing to people who are not intimately familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System, Rocky Mountain Arsenal and the laws and regulations guiding their management. The Service believes that the language in the draft plan is correct and appropriate.

2. Section 1.2, Purpose and Need for this Plan, first para – a) 4th sentence – CDPHE suggests that the Service replace “waste streams” with “significantly contaminated soil excavation projects” since many other waste streams such as contaminated groundwater and landfill leachate will continue to be treated. Also, the Section 36 Balance of Areas Soil Remediation Project biota soil removal (approximately 55,000 cubic yards) will begin in January 2005 and therefore some contaminated soil excavation and disposal activity will continue into 2005. b) 5th sentence - Along these same lines, please insert “soil” before the word “cleanup”, since the groundwater cleanup will continue during and after this time period.

Response: Thank you for your comment, the plan has been changed as suggested. A sentence was also added to acknowledge that the remediation of groundwater will continue for years after soil remediation is complete.

3. Section 1.3, Visitor Safety, 3rd bullet – The reader would benefit from an explanation of the kinds of public use programs that may occur in Refuge areas outside the Southern Tier Public Use areas. No activities outside the Southern Tier are described in subsequent sections of the plan.

Response: The only activities anticipated outside the Southern Tier Public Use Area would be staff-led programs to provide specific wildlife observation opportunities. Specifically, opportunities to view burrowing owls from the East Perimeter Road are considered. The plan has been revised to explain that. Also the plan was revised to acknowledge that Lake Ladora, a fishing venue, that is partially in the Southern Tier Public Use Area, is not yet part of the Refuge.

4. Section 5.0, Access Control – a) Will the side roads (e.g., 6th Avenue, etc.) be blocked off during weekday visitor access as depicted in the Appendix H figure? b) The CDPHE understands that the signs formerly positioned at the perimeter guard stations identifying the RMA as a remediation site will be moved to the boundary of the National Priorities List site as described in the IICP (pg. 3) and discussed in RMA Council meetings. The C Street sign in particular, should be repositioned prior to initiation of weekday visitor access. If the other RMA parties agree, CDPHE recommends a joint review of the current language on the signs with the goal of simplification and enhanced public understanding. c) If weekday visitor access is by reservation only, would it make sense to escort visitors from the south gate to the visitor center to ensure visitors don’t inadvertently stray beyond the Southern Tier Public Use Area? d) second para. – According to this section, the South Gate will not be staffed during the weekend visitation

program. The IICP requires that the perimeter fence and staffed access gates be maintained. How will the Service and Army address this conflict in stated policy between the two documents? CDPHE recommends that the Service check this and any other appropriate existing documents (e.g., Basin F Waste Pile 100% Design, Site Wide Air Quality Monitoring Program Plan, Site Wide Odor Monitoring Program Plan, RMA Medical Monitoring Program Recommendations Final Report, Visitor Risk Review Handbook) to ensure this plan meets prior commitments.

Response: Cross roads off C Street will be gated as required for BEMA and refuge management purposes. It is anticipated that the gate on 6th Ave. on the east side of C St. will be gated most of the time, but that the gate on the west side that provides access to the Logistics Area will not be gated on weekdays. Gating these roads on weekdays will not be necessary to control visitors who will have a special pass and will be instructed to travel only to the Visitor Center. This system is very similar to the system currently in place that provides other official business visitors to access RMA. Visitors obtain a visitor pass from the gate attendant and are directed to Bldg. 111, Bldg. 130, or wherever they have business within the Open Area of RMA, as prescribed in the RVO Health and Safety Plan. The system works well, and has not resulted in permitted visitors entering unauthorized areas. The Service does not believe that it is necessary or reasonable to have to meet people with reservations at the gate and escort them to the Visitor Center. There is no reason to suspect that Refuge visitors would be any more likely to “inadvertently stray” than the many people who visit RMA daily for other official business. Visitor Center staff will be notified by gate attendants when scheduled visitors arrive and will detect any problem quickly if visitors do not arrive at the Visitor Center timely.

The sign that was formerly affixed to the top of the South Gate has already been relocated north on C Street to inform people they are entering a remediation site. The sign is located just south of the haul road and north of the Visitor Center at the approximate Refuge north boundary. The sign on the former West Gate has also been relocated to the Service/Army boundary at 7th Ave. and B Street. The Service will be happy to work with CDPHE and other RMA Parties to review the language on these signs to simplify the language and enhance public understanding. The Service is also open to any suggestions about the exact location of these signs if CDPHE or other Parties suggest a more appropriate location.

The issue of staffing the South Gate on weekends, when C St. will be gated just north of the Visitor Center driveway is addressed in the Service’s response to CDPHE’s general comment above. The Service looks forward to working with the RMA parties to appropriately revise the IICP.

The Service has and will continue review the appropriate documents for any inconsistencies. The plan is a Service document about how the Service intends to provide wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities for the public. The Service does not have the authority to negate any prior plans or agreements among the RMA Parties, but will make a best effort to insure that management of the Refuge is consistent with management of the RMA CERCLA site. The Service appreciates CDPHE’s assistance in identifying and resolving any inconsistencies.

5. Section 7.0, Public Use Program – Revaluation of public use programs should also be initiated at specific milestones during RMA remediation activities. A review of the plan should be

conducted prior to initiation of the Basin F Waste Pile, Former Basin F and Lime Basins projects, prior to cover construction (e.g., because of changing traffic patterns due to biota barrier deliveries), and following future RMA deletions. If the process for revising and updating this plan is cumbersome, the CDPHE recommends the parties convene now to discuss the potential impacts of the Basin F Waste Pile Soil Remediation Project and any appropriate revisions to the plan. While the Former Basin F project design process has not yet begun (provided the remedy change is formalized), the information gathered during design and experience gained from the Basin F Waste Pile should provide us with much of the necessary information to determine whether the Former Basin F excavation could impact the public access plan.

The CDPHE recommends that the Service suspend public access during the Basin F Waste Pile Soil Remediation project slow start intrusive activities period. The purpose of the slow start is to evaluate modeling assumptions and assess selected odor and emissions controls. We believe it would be prudent to restrict public use until the air quality and odor emissions and emissions control assumptions are “proven out”. We also will recommend to the RMA Air Coordination Group that it review relevant portions of the Basin F Waste Pile Soil Remediation 100% Design to confirm that planned emission controls and monitoring is adequate. During the development of this design, the CDPHE may not have fully appreciated the Service’s plans to conduct public use activities during Basin F Waste Pile excavation and believes it is important to check the design.

Response: Thank you for your comments. The plan has been revised to include (para. 7.0) provisions for a review of the Public Use Plan, in coordination with Army, EPA, CDPHE, and TCHD, prior to initiation Basin F Waste Pile, Former Basin F, and Lime Basins projects. These reviews will provide an opportunity to determine what changes in public use programming or air/odor monitoring may be necessary to insure visitor safety, and determine if any additional air/odor monitoring is necessary. The Service does not commit to a formal public comment period during these reviews, but based on input from CDPHE, TCHD, Army, and EPA, will make temporary changes to its programming that are appropriate.

The Service suggests that CDPHE recommendations for the RMA Air Coordination Group be made directly to that Group.

Paragraph 11.2.3 has been revised to suspend public access during the Basin F Waste Pile Soil Remediation Project slow start intrusive activities period.

6. Section 7.1.1, Drop-in Program, second para. – While admittedly pedestrians and bicyclists are rare along 56th Avenue and Havana Street, how will weekend visitors know that access is restricted to individuals using motor vehicles?

Response: Paragraph 7.1.1 has been revised. Signs will be posted at the South Gate informing pedestrians and bicyclists not to enter the Refuge. People who arrive at the South Gate on foot or on bicycles will be directed to call the Visitor Center to arrange to be picked up and transported to and from the Visitor Center from the South Gate.

7. Section 7.2.1, Guided Interpretive Tour Procedures – For consistency with the format of other procedures sections in Section 7, should the last sentence indicate that the participants will enter through the south gate?

Response: Paragraph 7.2.1 has been changed per your suggestion.

8. Section 11.2.1, Chemical Agent, first para – a) Instead of “It is anticipated that this plan will be implemented following completion of remedy projects that have a potential to encounter chemical agent munitions” shouldn’t it simply read “This plan will be implemented following completion of remedy projects that have a potential to encounter chemical agent munitions”? b) The plan states “...it may be necessary to suspend visitation during any remedial work that requires agent monitoring...Lime Basins material.” Shouldn’t this statement be changed to “...it will be necessary to suspend visitation during any remedial work that requires agent monitoring...”?

Response: Based on comments from CDPHE and TCHD, and recent changes in the schedule for some remedial work, paragraph 11.2.1 has been rewritten. The Service will immediately suspend public use programming and refuge visitor access if any suspected chemical agent munition or other chemical agent item is encountered at RMA. Public use programming and visitor access will remain closed until it is determined, in consultation with Army, EPA, CDPHE, and TCHD, that no chemical agent hazard to visitors exists.

Since the Draft Public Use Plan was released for public comment, the Service has learned that the scope and extent of the Section 36 Balance of Areas geophysical target characterization work has grown, and this project will likely not be completed, as was projected several months ago, in October – November, 2004 time frame. In response, the plan has been revised to include provisions for no public use programming on days when UXO personnel will be digging in the Section 36 Balance of Areas project area to characterize geophysical targets. This will significantly restrict weekday visitation until that work is completed, now expected in January – February 2005. Although over 7,000 targets have been characterized, with no finds of chemical agent items, the Service still considers the potential to be too high to allow visitation during that remedy work. A limited number of days will be available when no invasive work is in progress. Those dates are being closely coordinated between the Service and RVO/PMC.

The Service has also learned that the PMC will be conducting some test drilling work around the Lime Basins from late November through December 2004 that will require agent monitoring. No weekday public use will be scheduled during that work. However, the Service does not believe it is appropriate at this time to state that all visitation will be suspended whenever any agent monitoring is on-going at RMA. There may well be instances when agent monitoring is required for worker safety in a very limited exclusion zone, and the work would produce no hazard to visitors on the Refuge. Reviews of the plan, in coordination with Army and regulatory agencies, prior to initiation of projects identified in paragraph 7.0, will provide opportunity to discuss project specific changes that may be appropriate if/when agent monitoring is necessary.

9. Section 11.2.2, Unexploded Ordnance, second sentence, second para. – Consistent with the

September 2002 Interim Plan and previous Service spokesperson commitments in public forums, CDPHE recommends that public use activities be immediately suspended if a potential chemical agent item is encountered rather than waiting until confirmation of chemical agent is made. Since the risk of encountering these items is low, continuing this policy has a low probability of disrupting public use activities.

Response: The Service thinks that part of this comment is related to paragraph 11.2.1 of the plan, and is addressed in the response to CDPHE Specific Comment No. 8, above. The recommendation to immediately suspend public use activities if a potential chemical agent item is encountered has been accepted and paragraph 11.2.1 has been revised accordingly. Paragraph 11.2.2, Unexploded Ordnance, has been revised to insure it is consistent with the IICP.

10. Section 11.2.3, Odors and Air Quality – a) CDPHE is not in accord with the statement that because the refuge property is further away than the perimeter fence line from Basin F that no odors are anticipated to be detected on the refuge and that no odor monitoring will be necessary for the conduct of public use programs. Depending on source material, wind direction and air stability, there is a possibility of odor impacts at or above the limits defined by the Interim Visitor Access Plan.

Response: The language regarding proximity of the Basin F Waste Pile to the RMA perimeter fence and Refuge visitor venues has been deleted. CDPHE's recommendation to suspend public use programs during the Basin F Waste Pile "slow start" period is good advice and is accepted by the Service. The Service agrees to review the Public Use Plan prior to initiation of specific projects with odor generating potential. This plan does supercede and replace the September 2002 Interim Plan for Weekend Visitor Access and the Service does not, at this time, agree to retain all aspects of the odor monitoring requirements of that plan. The Service does agree to further discussions of odor monitoring requirements prior to initiation of the Basin F Waste Pile, Former Basin F, and Lime Basins projects.

b) The statement that no special air monitoring is needed to support public use of the Refuge is inconsistent with agreements that have been made for sampling during the Basin F Waste Pile project (i.e., 1-in-3 day sampling at Visitor Location 2 air monitoring location; see Basin F Waste Pile Enhanced Air, Odor and Meteorological Monitoring Plan). All projects have at least a potential for a release, and Basin F Wastepile has always been recognized as a problematic site requiring extra diligence in the design of air controls and air quality monitoring program. Also, the phrase "There are no remaining remedy projects that are anticipated to generate health and safety hazards on the Refuge through the air pathway..." is a bit confusing and may be able to be improved. Does this mean there were previous projects that created hazards or had more potential to create hazards than the future Basin F projects? It may be better to frame this statement in terms of our reliance upon an effectively planned soil remediation and a well-designed air-monitoring program to protect public health during the remediation.

Response: The confusing language has been deleted. Paragraph 11.2.3 has been revised to indicate that air quality and odor monitoring will be conducted by RVO, in accordance with site-wide and project specific planning documents agreed to by RVO and Regulatory Agencies. The Service does not agree, at this time, to odor monitoring by Service employees, prior to

opening for public use programming on a daily basis, or to incorporate all odor monitoring requirements that were included in the September 2002 Interim Plan for Weekend Visitor Access. That plan was written with specific acknowledgement of the odor-generating potential of the South Plants remedial work that was immediately adjacent to the Southern Tier Public Use Area. The Service does agree to review, with CDPHE and other RMA parties, odor monitoring requirements for specific future projects and to make changes that are appropriate. The Service agrees that it is appropriate to suspend visitation during the “slow-start” period for the Basin F Waste Pile.

c) A discussion of the Visitor Location 2 (VL-2) air quality monitor and the site-specific acute air criteria (developed in part for visitor protection, see Air Pathways Analysis Task 1 – Air Criteria Plan) and odor action level (OAL-2) should be added to the plan. Furthermore, the sentence from the interim plan, “Visitor access will be prohibited/suspended if measured air concentrations are detected in excess of accepted RMA acute chemical air criteria” should be restated here. Also, the Final Site-Wide Odor Monitoring Program (July 1999) states that if odor exceeds OAL-2 for a 15-minute period, visitation activities at VL-1 and VL-2 will cease until odors no longer exceed OAL-2 levels. This criterion is relevant to the plan until the soil remediation is complete and should be stated in this section.

Response: The plan has been revised to include the specific sentence recommended. The Service chooses to defer specific discussions on odor action levels and air quality monitoring stations to the reviews of this plan prior to initiation of specific projects with odor-generating potential.

VL-1 is Rattlesnake Hill, and this plan does not address any visitation at that location. Also, it is unclear whether CDPHE interprets criteria for cessation of visitation at VL-2 to just include the immediate vicinity of the Visitor Center, or if that criteria would apply to the entire Southern Tier Public Use Area. The Service looks forward to discussing these issues with CDPHE and resolving them prior to initiation of potential odor-generating projects.

c) Paragraph 3 states: “If a final decision is made to excavate Lime Basins which is closer to the Refuge, this plan may be reviewed in coordination with the Army and the Regulatory Agencies (EPA, CDPHE), and TCHD to determine if odor monitoring is necessary.” Please change this sentence to “If a final decision is made to excavate Lime Basins, this plan will be reviewed in coordination with the Army and the Regulatory Agencies (EPA, CDPHE), and TCHD to determine if additional odor monitoring is necessary.”

Response: This paragraph has been deleted and the Service has included language providing for a review of the plan, to determine odor-monitoring requirements prior to initiating the Lime Basins project.

d) The second-to-last sentence in this section states that refuge personnel will maintain communications with the RVO Air Group. While this communication is appropriate and encouraged, the CDPHE would like to continue to be advised and involved in decisions about remedy-generated air/odor issues and public use programming through our participation in remedy committees (e.g., Air Coordination Group and RMA Committee).

Response: The paragraph has been deleted. The Service cannot abrogate its responsibility for making decisions on refuge management – including public use programming. However, it is the Service's desire to continue to work cooperatively with all RMA Parties and seek input from CDPHE and other interested parties when making its decisions. The Service looks forward to continuing this dialog within the RMA ACG, RMA Committee, or directly with CDPHE at any time. Although this step-down plan is being prepared in a public process including a formal comment period, the Service is open to comments and suggestions from CDPHE and others, regarding any aspect of refuge management, at any time.

11. Appendix B, Health and Safety Plans/Programs – a) Is it appropriate to mention Central Dispatch in this section since all references to Central Dispatch appear to be removed from the public access plan? b) Please reference the Site Wide Air Quality Monitoring Program Plan and the Site-Wide Odor Monitoring Program. These documents describe the air pathway “triggers” that would prompt temporary cancellation of on-post public use activities (i.e., the health-based air quality and nuisance odor criteria) and therefore are quite relevant to public use until the soil remediation is complete.

Response: The Service believes that the references to Central Dispatch are appropriate. For the time-being, Central Dispatch continues to function. However, it is unknown how long Central Dispatch will continue to exist, or how the dispatch function at RMA may evolve.

The Site-Wide Air Quality Monitoring Program Plan and the Site-Wide Odor Monitoring Program Plan have been included in Appendix B.

12. Appendix I, Visitor Safety Fact Sheet – This fact sheet should be reviewed and updated for currency. Only the first page was provided in the appendix but a few out-of-date statements appear, including that reservations are required for all visitor programs and that visitors are shuttled on to the Refuge during the drop-in program. Please provide the revised fact sheet for review.

Response: The Service agrees. The RVO Public Relations Office has been tasked by RVO managers to revise the Visitor Safety Fact Sheet. The revised Fact Sheet will be available for review by the RMA Public Affairs Sub-Committee that includes representation from CDPHE.

13. Appendix N, General Fishing Information and Regulations – This appendix should be reviewed and updated for currency. For example, the Weekend Reservations Requirements section states that fishing reservations are required which is inconsistent with the plan.

Response: Thank you for your comment, the Fishing Regulations will be revised as appropriate.

14. Appendices – CDPHE recommends reinstating the appendix with a figure showing the remaining remediation projects in relation to the refuge. Additionally, it would be helpful to show the location of permanent air monitoring stations including VL-1 and VL-2 on the figure. Once the environmental cleanup is completed, this figure could be replaced with one showing the location of Army-retained areas.

Response: Thank you for your comment. The Service chooses not to include a map showing all remaining remediation projects. Such a map, including all of the projects, such as removal of Bldgs. 618, 619, 111, and sanitary sewer projects would be very confusing and of little value to the public. The Service has identified, in text, the remaining projects with significant potential to impact public use, and does not believe an additional figure will add significant value to the Public Use Plan.

Comment from Irv Cohen

I have been a Volunteer for the Refuge since 1990, and have participated in a great many of the public use programs during this time, including public tours, special events, environmental education programs both on the Refuge and in the public schools, outreach talks explaining the Refuge programs, history, and cleanup operations. I have reviewed the Public Use Plan, and fully agree with it. It more than adequately covers all aspects of public use, and provides for a sound basis for reestablishing public access to the Refuge on that portion deemed appropriate for public activities. It will be my pleasure to continue to provide volunteer time to the Refuge under this plan.

Irwin H. (Irv) Cohen, Ph.D.

Response: Thank you for your comment.

2. Comment from Irv Cohen

I have sent in my comments on the PUP, but did not raise question about the statements that indicate that CPR and First Aid training are required for personnel staffing programs described in 7.2 and 7.4.1. I have no objection to that requirement, but it was my understanding that those would be optional for volunteers at the present time. The document looks great to me. It is hardly my area of expertise, but it seemed to cover everything in A-1 governmental bureauocratize. -Irv

Response: Service personnel are required to be trained in CPR and First Aid, however, it is optional for Refuge volunteers. Training will continue to be offered to Refuge volunteers periodically at which time they may receive re-certification or new certification. There are always trained Service personnel on duty when programs occur. The language in the plan will be changed to reflect CPR and First Aid training only applies to Service personnel.

3. Comments from Tim and Kathy Hogan

Greetings,

I have looked over the Public Use Plan and think it is a workable plan. I am a Refuge Volunteer and, as such, may have thoughts different than those of the general public. Maybe not. Here they are:

Section 5.0, Access control

After all the guarding and guiding until now, there is a provision to leave the South gate open on

weekends. Doesn't that make you nervous? At the very least we would have to improve the latching system on the access control gates along C Street. There are way too many people who know they will just push open. Plus there are plenty of ways to get in trouble besides going North on C Street. Anyone who has had a tour of the place in the last ten years is aware of that.

Response: The Service continually monitors the condition of latches on the gates and makes repairs as needed. The Service does not believe that maintaining staff at the South Gate on weekends is necessary to prevent visitors from entering unauthorized areas, or is a wise use of limited resources. We base that belief on our experience with weekend visitation since October 2002, and the current status of remediation activities.

Various sections

The phrase "trained in CPR, First Aid, and incident reporting" is used more than once. You need to poll the troops and see exactly who really has that training. I do, but I didn't get it from you, and you never asked, nor did you offer to give me a refresher on any of those three topics. My training is some years old, and I am sure a brush-up would be to everyone's advantage.

Response: Service personnel are required to be trained in CPR and First Aid, however, it is optional for Refuge volunteers. Training will continue to be offered to Refuge volunteers periodically at which time they may receive re-certification or new certification. There are always trained Service personnel on duty when programs occur. The language in the plan will be changed to reflect that CPR and First Aid training is required for Service personnel.

During new volunteer orientations, the procedure for reporting incidents is covered by the Volunteer Coordinator. Health and safety issues are covered during regularly scheduled volunteer meetings which include refreshers on various safety procedures including the incident reporting and use of radios.

Section 10.0, Program Staff

That plan in the first paragraph may solve the above problem. This is a tough spot. As funding steers the size of the staff, the programs wax and wane. It is so thin now that everybody is wearing six hats. There is no way this section can be adequately performed with the existing skeleton crew. I realize that this plan is for now and into the future, but right now it will be a tough nut to crack.

Response: The Service has made adjustments to public programming to ensure there is adequate personnel on duty to cover visitor activities. The number of programs offered weekly are carefully evaluated in order to maintain a quality visitor experience while providing for their safety. Unfortunately, the number of programs may need to be reduced at times depending on staffing levels.

Section 11.2.3, Odors and Air Quality

Paragraph three, "If a final decision is made..." The first half of that sentence does not make any sense to me. Only possibility is if "Lime Basins" is a place name. Even then the sentence doesn't flow right.

Finally, a comment on something that isn't in the plan, but should be. There are others who appear to represent the Refuge. Specifically the Wildlife Society. They have a website (that was off-line last night when I checked, and maybe that solves the problem) where information is given on various aspects of Refuge life. When this information is inaccurate or outdated it actually does us a disservice. For example, that website stated well into the summer that the Refuge was currently closed. How did that impact our visitor count? Other than suggesting an update, you apparently have no say over what is posted on that website. But you should, and that is my point. After being so careful with all these other steps to guarantee a safe and well orchestrated visit by the public we get blindsided by someone, however well meaning, who manages to turn the public away. That's not right, and it should be addressed in the plan.

Response: The Service works closely with the RMA Wildlife Society to maintain the consistency of information through printed materials and the web sites. Due to an unfortunate technical problem, the information on the Society's web site could not be accessed by anyone in their organization. The web site has since been taken off-line until the problem can be resolved. It is not the intention by any means of the Society to give out incorrect information and they always coordinate with the Service the projects and programs they provide.

Good luck with this plan. I think it merits a fair trial. I plan to do my part to see that people visiting the Refuge have a positive, informative, and rewarding experience.

Tim Hogan, Roving Interpreter.

4. Comment from Deb Lerch Cushman, Colorado Division of Wildlife

Hi there- Thanks so much for sending me the plan and allowing me to comment. The Arsenal will always hold a special place in my heart and it is exciting to see and hear the changes taking place! I can't find the letter that tells me where or who to send comments to. So here is my one thought and please include it, pass it on, or tell me if you would like this on letter head and where to direct it.

My one concern is that I did not see anyplace in the plan that there will still be pick up of visitors from the gate. It limits anyone who does not have a car or motorcycle from participating in programs. They could still get to RMA by walking or bus perhaps but would not be able to get to the visitor center. Are you still planning on doing a van shuttle from the gate to the VC when necessary? I am assuming that the gate would be staffed anyways, so they could call to the VC and than a volunteer could drive down in a van if necessary or available.

Thanks again and take care, Deb

Response: Paragraph 7.1.1 has been revised. Signs will be posted at the South Gate informing pedestrians and bicyclists not to enter the Refuge. People who arrive at the South Gate on foot or on bicycles will be directed to call the Visitor Center to arrange to be picked up and transported to and from the Visitor Center from the South Gate.

5. Comment from Cynthia L. Seidel, Adams County School District 14

Adams County School District 14
DIVISION OF STUDENT LEARNING
4720 E. 69th Avenue
Commerce City, CO 80022

Letter of Support for Public Use Plan

October 7, 2004

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Rocky Mountain Arsenal
Building 121
Commerce City, Colorado 80022

Please accept this letter as an enthusiastic endorsement of the proposed public use plan for the Rocky Mountain Arsenal nature preserve. This reclaimed track of prairie grassland and the rich array of wildlife it supports are tremendous assets to the students of Adams County School District 14, their families, and the Greater Denver community. I have reviewed the proposed plan for increased access to the nature area for our school groups and public tours. This is an opportunity that should not be missed!

For the past several years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been a partner with the school district in promoting environmental education through the provision of a specialized science teacher for our students. Most of the learning activities have occurred at other area sites for outdoor experiences. We have long awaited the day that the arsenal itself, with its unparalleled population of eagles, prairie animals and pristine grasslands, would become a huge environmental science classroom for our students.

We sincerely hope this day has come, and urge approval of the public use plan.

Sincerely,

Cynthia L. Seidel
Assistant Superintendent

Response: Thank you for your comment.

6. Comment from Rick Kinshella, Tri-County Health Department

Dear Mr. Rundle:

Tri-County Health Department (TCHD) appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's revised Public Use Plan for Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge (RMANWR). The RMA cleanup is about to enter a transition period where predominantly clean construction will take place, e.g. Enhanced Landfill construction, uncontaminated gradefill placement, and cover construction. This transition period will be followed by remediation of the final projects listed in the RMA Record of Decision. Considering this change, TCHD supports the proposal to expand public use programs at the refuge from weekends only to weekdays with the limitations outlined in the draft plan.

TCHD does request the USFWS consider on revision to the document. We recommend that the concepts for program suspension outlined in Section 5.2 of the current Interim Plan for Weekend Visitor Access be retained in the revised plan. Although TCHD concurs that there is very limited potential to discover potential chemical agent-filled munitions at this point of the remediation, we believe it is appropriate to suspend weekday and weekend programs until the suspect item has been cleared by the appropriate authorities.

Please contact Dan Collins or myself if you have questions regarding our comments.

Sincerely,

TRI-COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Rick Kinshell, P.E.
RMA Program Engineer

cc: Greg Hargreaves, EPA Tom Jackson, USFWS
Barbara Nabors, CDPHE Bruce Huenefeld, PMRMA
Mark Thompson, Shell RMA file

Response: Paragraph 11.2.1 has been rewritten. The Service will immediately suspend public use programming and refuge visitor access if any suspected chemical agent munition or other chemical agent item is encountered at RMA. Public use programming and visitor access will remain closed until it is determined, in consultation with Army, EPA, CDPHE, and TCHD, that no chemical agent hazard to visitors exists.

7. Comment from Suzanne B. O'Neill, Rocky Mountain Arsenal Wildlife Society

Dear Ms. James:

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal Wildlife Society, I am pleased to convey our full support of the draft Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Plan, October 2004. We believe it fully satisfies the potential safety issues, as we understand them. Resumption of the environmental education programming is vitally important to the northeast Denver Metropolitan Area schools and beyond. We commend the U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Service for thoroughly providing for their future at the Refuge.

It appears very efficient and convenient for weekend visitors to access the South Gate without consuming limited Service personnel resources at the Gate. As to the fishing program provisions, we are pleased to note the flexibility that allows the Service to offer an extensive program for anglers and also affords wildlife viewers and birders some opportunities for observation adjacent to the lakes that do not wholly overlap with fishing activities.

Thank-you for your excellent stewardship of this Refuge and extensive public use program.

Sincerely,

Suzanne B. O'Neill
President

Response: Thank you for your comment.

8. Comment from George Cole

Gentlemen: My father is in a wheel chair and enjoys fishing at the arsenal. When we began fishing in the area Dad was able to walk and we fished together often as we do now. The arsenal is a special place for us because it offers a "get away environment close to Denver.

We have always found the staff supportive and rely helpful not only to us but others as we observe them under a variety of conditions. This is a great asset to a very unique operation for FWS. The Arsenal is a refuge that for practical purposes operates as a national park or monument without the benefit of attendant funding.

Our hope is the wheel chair/special needs access to Mary can be improved with asphalt trails and parking area and similar access can be constructed on Ledora.

The interpretive and guided programs are great once again due to the staff.

I would welcome the opportunity to assist in the further development of this resources for the enjoyment of the people of the area. George Cole

Response: Thank you for your comment. The Service continues to look for ways (as funding and staffing levels permit) to increase and improve opportunities for visitors of all abilities that are compatible with wildlife and the resource.

9. Comment from Tom Acre

The plan is a comprehensive one that fully considers the on-going activities of the remedy and also provides the much needed week-day Environmental Ed. to schools and groups.

This plan does meet my needs for public visitation at this time.

I strongly support the transfer of additional land to fish and wildlife so infrastructure for the completed refuge can be started. With only a few remedy projects remaining and the vast majority of the RMA in its final clean-up state, this land needs to be transferred to F & W now!

How will access to the refuge change if and when eagles are removed from the endangered species list?

I would like to see increased access to open areas of the refuge consistent with the comprehensive plan.

Response: Access to the Refuge will continue to be available to the public based on wildlife and habitat resources and biological studies. Additional access will become available as more land is transferred to the Service consistent with Comprehensive Management Plan.

10. Comment from Angela Medbery

Very brief (first impressions of the plan)

I wanted #'s of visitors/week rather than of tours/weeks and got #'s in the Q & A period.

The EA refers to the refuge without specifying the boundaries 2003, 2004, 2008 boundaries be specific as to primary or secondary property jurisdiction.

State in plan what circumstances would bring on plan amendments eg increased FWS staff to permit more tours.

Request delineation of visitors 1990 to present by year

Request copy of the 1999 Visitor Access Plan.

Response: Thank you for your comment. The requested information will be sent. The Public Use Plan outlines programs that will occur only on land that has been deleted and transferred to the Service.